DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 324 915 FL 018 076

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TITLE Language and Literacy: The ESL Whole Language Connection.
PUB DATE 90
NOTE 11p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Brainstorming; Class Activities; Classroom Techniques; Dialog Journals; Efficiency; *English (Second Language); Interpersonal Communication; Language Skills; Second Language Instruction; Skill Development; *Whole Language Approach; Writing Exercises
IDENTIFIERS *Semantic Mapping

ABSTRACT

It is proposed that through the use of whole language techniques, an English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) teacher can incorporate holistic language situations into the ESL classroom and advance the student's acquisition of a second language. Whole language techniques such as spontaneous conversation, brainstorming with semantic maps, dialogue journals, and writing folders are described. Student work samples provide illustrations. It is concluded that by including a whole language system in the ESL classroom, a teacher can teach all four language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing), thereby maximizing the use of instructional time and exposing students to a large amount of language in many different forms. (MSE)

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Language and Literacy:

The ESL Whole Language Connection

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RUNNING HEAD: ESL WHOLE LANGUAGE

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Abstract

Through the use of whole language techniques, an ESL teacher can incorporate holistic language situations into the ESL classroom and advance the acquisition of a second language by the student. Through the use of whole language techniques, an ESL teacher can provide natural language acquisition that is meaningful to the student. Whole language techniques such as spontaneous conversations, brainstorming with semantic maps, dialogue journals, and writing folders are described. Student work samples provide illustrations. By including a whole language system in the ESL classroom, a teacher can teach to all four components of a language program (listening, speaking, reading, and writing). The teacher thereby maximizes instructional time and exposes students to a large amount of language in many different forms.

Language and Literacy:

The ESL Whole Language Connection

Educators marvel at the ease with which most children acquire their native language. However, when learning a second language, these same children seem to go through an arduous and painfully slow acquisition process. Reproduction of effective, stimulating, and time efficient natural language learning situations in the classroom can facilitate second language learning. Through the use of whole language techniques, an ESL teacher can incorporate holistic language situations into the ESL classroom and thus advance the acquisition of a second language by the student.

Quality instruction of a second language focuses on the semantic meanings within a communication. Milk (1985) states that effective ESL teaching allows students to interact meaningfully in the target language. The instructional focus should be on the integrated communicated message rather than the syntactical form. Krashen (1980) maintains that second language acquisition occurs when the acquirer receives comprehensible input in the target language. Machado (1985) states that a classroom rich in opportunities to use language in natural situations stimulates comprehensible input. This occurs

through communication and exchanging of ideas in the target language. Therefore, ESL instruction should focus on communicating messages in natural situations.

The whole language method of teaching language acquisition is based on this "message" philosophy. Ferguson (1988) states that whole language is an approach in which a student's learning is based on familiar experiences. This creates a learning environment that is meaning-based and focused on the message. Student needs, interests, and abilities combine with curriculum goals to determine a lesson. According to Hayward (1988), whole language is based on the premise that children learn language by using it, writing it, thinking it and reading it. Furthermore, Hayward states that words are not isolated; they are taught in natural situations. In whole language, vocabulary is developed or expanded through extensive reading and exposure to words in a variety of contexts. Hillerich (1990) states that involvement in language stimulates a desire to increase vocabulary. This increase can be assisted through varied, meaning-based vocabulary activities that are based on the student's experiences. Thus, whole language and ESL instruction are based on the same basic principles. Effective whole language and effective ESL instruction are:

1. meaning-based,
2. oriented to natural situations,
3. based on the prior experiences of the student.

ESL instruction and whole language philosophy also both focus on four components: listening, speaking, reading and writing. In some traditional ESL methods, these components are taught in a hierarchical order even though the students may be instructionally ready for all four. By including a whole language system in the ESL classroom, a teacher teaches to all four components, thereby maximizing instructional time and exposing students to a large amount of language in many different forms.

Spontaneous Conversations

In a whole language-based ESL classroom, spontaneous conversations should be encouraged when appropriate. Spontaneous comments made by the students can serve as language models for each other, provide opportunities to hear new expressions, and reinforce concepts already taught. According to Ferguson (1988), students working together help them to value themselves and each other, thus fostering a sense of community and cooperation. The following spontaneous comments were made during a game of color-and-shape bingo among a group of three kindergarten students.

Jose: "Here we go again." (at the beginning of the second game)

Jose: "Oh, I forgot." (when failing to place a marker on a bingo square)

Julie: "He got carried away!" (responding to Jose)

Ricky: "I'm too low." (complaining that his chair was too small for him)

These students were all at the end of their first year of ESL instruction. Upon entering the program, the children had minimal language production in English. In one year, they progressed from almost non-production to internalization and usage of English idioms and expressions in natural situations. The students were able to practically apply their knowledge to real-life situations. This knowledge will follow them far out of the classroom.

Spontaneous conversations provide anecdotal records about a student's language development. For example, the following conversation shows that five-year-old David is beginning to learn manipulate language in a variety of forms and meanings.

Teacher: "David, put your painting on the table so it can dry."

David: "Why, did we wash it?"

By observing his comment, the teacher learned that David

knows various meanings and applications for the word "dry". He also knows that words can be used to create humor and how to apply his knowledge in a meaning-based, natural situation.

Brainstorming With Semantic Maps

According to Johnson and Pearson (1984), the whole language technique of brainstorming with semantic maps helps activate a student's prior knowledge, arouse a student's interest in a topic and stimulate a student's oral language production. A semantic map is a graphic representation of a topic and its related concepts. The teacher writes a vocabulary item on the chalkboard and then asks the students to orally state everything they know about the topic. Comments are arranged by category. Johnson and Pearson (1984) found that semantic maps facilitate vocabulary instruction, relate concepts in a meaningful way, and provide an assessment of student familiarity with a topic. The following is an example of a semantic map produced by a third grade ESL class for the concept "zoo." Because they did not know the term "reptile house", the students chose to label the group of words with "Scary Place." During further study during the week, the students will use their research skills meaningfully to discover the correct term in a message-based context.

Animals		Zookeeper
zebras	elephants	feeds animals
cheetahs	monkeys	earns money
bears	alligators	cleans cages

ZOO

A Zoo	Scary Place
is fun	snakes
is a nice place	tarantulas
makes me laugh	frogs

Dialogue Journals

Dialogue journals aid in ESL instruction by providing students with a non-threatening, comfortable environment in which to write. Each student keeps a notebook in which he writes to the teacher about any topic which is meaningful to him. The teacher responds by writing back to the student in the journal. The work is never graded or corrected, nor is it seen by anyone other than the student and teacher. Dialogue journals help ESL students learn about writing without apprehension. The following is a sample from a writing journal of a fourth grade ESL student.

Ayla: Last Saturday I went horse riding. My horses name is Peaches. She was a beauty. She was white. Next Saturday I'm going ther agian. It only costs ten dollors.

Teacher: Horseback riding is fun. I rode two times on my husband's horse before she died. Her name was DeeDee.

Ayla: That was sad. I was sad when they took my grandfather horses. My grandfather had many horses.

Writing Folders

Each ESL student keeps a folder all year in which samples of work and writing in progress are kept. Folders assist in analyzing a student's writing progress throughout the year. The folders provide the student with a sense of ownership for their work. By keeping all drafts of a writing piece in the folder, the student learns how to examine, review, revise and edit writing.

Through the use of whole language techniques, an ESL teacher can provide language instruction that is meaningful to the student. Both effective whole language instruction and effective ESL instruction must allow the student to talk about, think about, listen to, draw about, act about read about and write about the language. Incorporation of whole language techniqes into the ESL classroom provides these meaning-based opportunities.

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Date Filmed

March 29, 1991